
To prevent and treat disease and disability; to promote healthy lifestyles; and to protect and promote the health and quality of our environment.

Information About Smallpox (Vaccinia) Vaccine

May 2002

Smallpox (Vaccinia) Vaccine

Smallpox vaccine does not contain smallpox (variola) virus but another live virus called vaccinia. Since this virus is closely related to smallpox virus, vaccination with vaccinia provides immunity against infection from smallpox virus. This vaccine was successfully used to eradicate smallpox from the human population.

Smallpox Vaccine Administration

Smallpox vaccine is licensed for persons 18 years of age and older.

- One dose--administered by using the multiple puncture technique with a bifurcated needle
- Revaccination at least every 10 years

Routine Non-emergency Vaccine Use

The world has been declared free of naturally occurring smallpox since 1980 so only persons at increased risk are currently being vaccinated. These include:

- Lab workers who handle cultures or animals infected with vaccinia
- Lab workers exposed to other pox viruses that infect humans
- Consider vaccination for other health care workers having contact with contaminated material

Emergency Vaccine Use (following a confirmed case of smallpox)

If an intentional release of smallpox (variola) virus were to occur, vaccine will be recommended for certain groups. These include:

- Persons exposed to the initial release of smallpox
- Close contact with a person diagnosed with smallpox (confirmed or suspected)
- Direct care or transportation of a person having a confirmed or suspected smallpox diagnosis
- Laboratory personnel involved in the care of a suspected or diagnosed person
- Other persons who have an increased risk of contact with infectious materials from a smallpox patient (e.g., personnel responsible for medical waste disposal, laundry, housekeeping, etc.)

Is Smallpox Vaccine available to anyone who wants it?

- No—not at this time.
- Vaccine can only be released under special circumstances (listed above).
- Smallpox vaccine supplies are controlled by the Centers For Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).
- U.S. government has contracted with vaccine supplier to increase production of smallpox vaccine to make it available if it is needed.
- Smallpox Vaccine will be stockpiled for use in the event of an emergency

Why is Smallpox Vaccine not recommended for everyone?

- Since the disease has been eradicated, risks from vaccine have been greater than the risk of smallpox disease
- Side effects and adverse reactions to smallpox vaccine can be serious in some persons getting the vaccine
- Some unvaccinated persons can get sick with vaccinia after being exposed to someone who has been vaccinated